Bangladesh dockers strike over foreign takeover of key port

DHAKA: Bangladesh's dock workers escalated a strike on Saturday at the country's biggest port, Chattogram, protesting plans by the interim government to lease operating licences to a foreign company.

The walkout, which began in small numbers in October, has now grown to around 200 workers at the port — Bangladesh's main trade gateway and a vital hub in the global garment supply chain.

"Foreign expert operators would increase the foreign investment and enhance the efficiency," Chattogram Port Authority chairman S. M. Moniruzzaman said.

Bangladesh, the world's second-largest garment exporter, relies heavily on Chattogram port — formerly known as Chittagong and strategically located on the Bay of Bengal — for most of its imports and exports.

According to state-run news agency BSS, UAE-based DP World has expressed interest in operating the port's New Mooring Container Terminal, and Danish shipping giant A. P. Moller-Maersk in the Laldia Container Terminal on the city's outskirts.

In October, Mohammed Yousuf, senior secretary at the Ministry of Shipping, said that "agreements are expected to be signed by December" with Bangladesh's interim administration.

The interim administration, which took over after the government of Sheikh Hasina was toppled in a mass uprising in August 2024, will be replaced after elections in February. The port move has sparked anger among some.

"We don't know if the new authority will hire us or restructure the entire system," striking docker Nur Uddin, 55, said. "Do they even have the mandate? They are an interim government," said Iliyas Bhuiyan, 56, another dockworker.—AFP

Building housing asylum seekers attacked in Ireland

LONDON: Multiple people were evacuated after an arson attack at a building housing asylum seekers in a town north of Dublin, Irish officials said on Saturday, condemning the "deeply disturbing incident".

Justice minister Jim O'Callaghan said fireworks were thrown into the building housing international protection applicants in Drogheda, a town 40 kilometres north of Dublin, on Friday night.

"This was a terrifying ordeal for the women and children living there, a number of whom were taken to hospital," O'Callaghan said in a statement on X, adding that a police investigation was underway.

Four children and one adult had to be rescued from the top floor of the building, according to local media reports.

The incident comes amid rising anti-immigration sentiment in Ireland and neighbouring Britain, with hotels and buildings housing asylum seekers a common flashpoint for protests and riots.

Dozens of people were arrested last month during a series of protests outside an asylum seeker hotel in southwest Dublin, some of which turned violent.

"I condemn in the strongest terms the deeply disturbing incident," Irish prime minister Micheal Martin said of Friday's attack.

"To put vulnerable families, including young children, at risk is abhorrent and has no place in our society."—AFP

KOSTIANTYNIKVA: Ukrainian soldiers walk near an apartment building damaged by a Russian military strike.—Reuters

US legislators urge Andrew to address Epstein ties

LONDON: Members of a US congressional committee investigating the Jeffrey Epstein case have intensified their calls for Andrew Mountbatten Windsor to answer questions about his ties to the late financier and sex offender, the *BBC* reported on Saturday.

King Charles stripped Andrew of his title of prince and evicted him from his mansion in the grounds of Windsor Castle on Thursday, responding to the outrage that had built around the royal over years of damaging headlines about his behaviour. Buckingham Palace said the censures were needed even though Andrew has continued to deny the allegations made against him.

In the US, the king's move led to more calls for Andrew to reveal all he knows about Epstein, particularly in the light of the expression of sympathy for victims of abuse in Thursday's statement from the palace.

The *BBC* said at least four Democrat members of the House Oversight Committee investigating the US government's handling of the Epstein case had renewed calls for Andrew to testify.

It quoted one of them, Democrat Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi, saying: "Come clean, come before the US Congress, voluntarily testify, don't wait for a subpoena come and testify and tell us what you know.

"Not just to give justice to the survivors but to prevent this from ever happening again." Another Democrat Congressman, Suhas Subramanyam, said Andrew could appear remotely with a lawyer and speak to the panel privately. Buckingham Palace has been asked to comment.

On Friday, UK trade minister Chris Bryant told the *BBC* that Andrew should go to the US to answer questions about Epstein. Separately on Saturday, the police watchdog for England and Wales, the Independent Office for Police Conduct, said that in light of media reports about Andrew it had contacted the Metropolitan Police to "understand if there are any matters that would meet the criteria for a referral to us".

In response, a spokesperson for the Metropolitan Police said that in 2016 officers had concluded that "other jurisdictions and organisations" were better placed to pursue the specific allegations and a decision was made not to proceed to a full criminal investigation.

Where will he live?

Buckingham Palace announced on Thursday that Andrew, 65, will leave his 30-room mansion in the sprawling Windsor Castle estate, following revelations that he had effectively paid no rent on the Royal Lodge as a result of a 2003 lease deal.

He will move to a house on the king's private — and remote — Sandringham estate in eastern England. "He's been sent up... to the royal equivalent of Siberia," royal biographer Robert Hardman told the *BBC*. Andrew should have plenty of lodging options at that royal country retreat, which reportedly has 150 residential properties.

Palace sources said the move would take place as soon as practicable. But commentators have said it could take months, including possibly to avoid an awkward encounter when the royal family gathers in Sandringham for Christmas celebrations — to which Andrew is not invited.

With what money?

It is understood that the king will privately fund the relocation and make a private provision for his brother. Beyond a modest naval pension and significant financial assets, the sources of Andrew's income remain unclear, particularly since he stepped back from royal duties following revelations of his ties to convicted US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Andrew no longer receives the yearly 250,000 ($315,000) awarded to active members of the royal family, and Charles reportedly stopped paying him an annual 1 million allowance in 2024. *The Guardian* newspaper reported on Sunday that Andrew could receive a one-off, six-figure payment as well as an annual stipend as part of his relocation plan.

Could he face legal woes?

Calls have grown for Andrew to be investigated over allegations that he sexually assaulted Virginia Giuffre, Epstein's main accuser, including having sex with her twice when she was just 17, all of which Andrew denies.—Agencies

Fierce fighting in Ukraine's frontline town

MOSCOW: Russian forces defeated a team of Ukrainian special forces which were rushed to the embattled eastern city of Pokrovsk in an attempt to prevent Russian forces from advancing further into the city, the Russian defence ministry said.

Russia wants to take the whole of the Donbas region, which comprises Luhansk and Donetsk provinces. Ukraine still controls about 10pc of Donbas — an area of about 5,000 square km in western Donetsk.

Capturing Pokrovsk, dubbed "the gateway to Donetsk" by Russian media, and Kostiantynivka to its northeast which Russian forces are also trying to envelop, would give Moscow a platform to drive north towards the two biggest remaining Ukrainian-controlled cities in Donetsk — Kramatorsk and Sloviansk.

Ukraine said that it had deployed special forces in Pokrovsk earlier in the week, landing a Black Hawk helicopter. At least 10 Ukrainian servicemen could be seen dismounting from a helicopter in a field. Russia's defence ministry said it had killed the group of Ukrainian military intelligence special forces.

"All 11 people who disembarked from the helicopter were killed," the ministry said, adding that Russian forces were pushing forward in Pokrovsk and clearing the area.

A Ukrainian military source said that the special forces had not been killed and added that the Ukrainian operation aimed at stabilising the area was still underway.

Russian forces, it said, had pushed back an attempt by Ukraine's 425th Separate Assault Regiment "Skala" to break out of Hryshyne, northwest of Pokrovsk, while the pincer around Ukrainian forces in the area was closing.

Battles around Hryshyne are significant, as they indicate Russian forces are close to cutting off Ukrainian supply lines to Pokrovsk.

Ukraine's only mine producing coking coal — used in its once vast steel industry — is around six miles (10 km) west of Pokrovsk. Ukrainian steelmaker Metinvest said in January it had suspended mining operations there.

Russian President Vladimir Putin says Donbas is now legally part of Russia but Kyiv and the West reject Moscow's seizure of the territory as an illegal land grab.

Russian forces used a pincer movement to almost fully encircle Pokrovsk and threaten Ukrainian supply lines, then harried Ukrainian forces by sending in small units and drones to disrupt logistics and sow chaos in their rear.

Essentially, Russia's tactics carved what Russian military bloggers called a grey zone of ambiguity out of the city where neither side had control but which was extremely difficult — and costly — to defend.

To clear both Pokrovsk and nearby Myrnohrad may take some time and so delay Russia's formal announcement. —Reuters

No high-level official to represent US at COP30 in Brazil

WASHINGTON: The United States will not send any top officials to the COP30 climate talks in Brazil later this month, a White House official said on Saturday, as President Donald Trump instead works to boost fossil fuels.

Trump, who withdrew from the Paris climate agreement for a second time upon his return to the White House in January, had not been expected to attend a leaders' summit ahead of the annual UN climate conference in Belem.

But it now appears he will not dispatch any top negotiators to the talks, to be held from November 10 to 21, either.

"The US is not sending any high-level representatives to COP30," a White House official said on condition of anonymity.

"The president is directly engaging with leaders around the world on energy issues, which you can see from the historic trade deals and peace deals that all have a significant focus on energy partnerships," Brazil said on Friday that fewer than 60 world leaders have confirmed they will attend the climate summit on November 6-7 — held separately this year to ease accommodation pressures.

The leaders of France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Norway, Colombia, Chile, Cape Verde, and Liberia will attend, their governments have confirmed.

China has said Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang will represent President Xi Jinping.

While Trump also exited the Paris deal in his first term, his administration has gone further this time, exerting its clout to boost fossil fuels globally.

This includes, for example, threatening countries with retaliatory measures if they agreed to a carbon pricing system by the UN's International Maritime Organization, effectively curtailing its implementation.

Climate advocates fear the administration could seek to withdraw from the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change — the treaty that underpins the Paris Agreement.

Doing so could prevent future administrations from re-entering the deal, but it is not clear if the executive branch has the legal authority to undo a Senate-ratified treaty.

Lower-level participation

While Trump's administration appears to be ignoring the summit, more than 100 state and local US leaders — including governors and mayors — are still expected to join the talks.

"We are showing up in force," Gina McCarthy, co-chair of the "America Is All In" coalition, said on a call on Thursday.

McCarthy formerly served as the head of the Environmental Protection Agency under former President Barack Obama and as a climate advisor to Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden.

She said the group heading to Brazil represented "two-thirds of the US population and three-quarters of the US GDP, and more than 50 percent of US emissions." "We'll deliver on the promises we made to the American people and our international colleagues," she said.

"Local leaders here have authority to act on their own behalf, to take climate action at home and abroad."

In all, 170 delegations are accredited for the main COP30 conference, taking place at a time of global political turmoil that many fear will overshadow the climate crisis.—AFP

NEWSMAKERS

EL CAPITAN (United States): Rock climbers, dressed as astronauts, before scaling the face of El Capitan amid the ongoing US government shutdown. Thousands of adrenaline junkies, including jumpers, are flocking to California's Yosemite National Park as the shutdown leaves park rangers short-staffed.—AFP

A CULTURAL troupe performs during the mass wedding.—AFP

MOROCCANS celebrate the UN vote in Rabat.—AFP

VATICAN CITY: Pope Leo XIV leads a mass at St Peter's Square during a ceremony to celebrate the Jubilee of the World Education on All Saints' Day.—AFP

Traditional mass wedding held in Nigeria to ensure prosperity

SHAO: This tradition of the mass Awon marriage, organised in the small town of Shao in Kwara State in October, is linked to local mythology.

The story goes that a young hunter from Shao once met a strange woman with a single breast near the river named Awon.

After spending several days with a man from the village, she asked the villagers to set aside a day each year to commemorate her visit by marrying all girls of a suitable age, to ensure the community's prosperity.

The goddess then disappeared.

Once dressed in their wedding finery in the palace of the local ruler, the young women parade through the streets of Shao before the priest of Awon blesses the mass wedding.

"All the women in my lineage also did it, so I have also determined that I will also get married in the Awon rites... Awon is a deity of fertility. She always blesses everybody with babies as many as you want, like me, I want many children," Adebiyi Abosede, a 25-year-old nurse, said.

"From my teenage years, I have decided to carry on the tradition of Shao because they told us that anyone who gets married with the Awon rites can never be barren, and we have also seen it from the past," said Adewale Afusat, a 31-year-old hairdresser.

"And we want to honour it so that it doesn't go into extinction." Jimoh Azizat, a hair stylist, added: "I particularly wanted to be part of the Awon wedding because I always see how colourful it is, and my mother too did it many years ago." Elegantly dressed in their finest gowns, the new brides were feted by dancers and musicians in a ceremony that attracts tourists from around Nigeria every year.—AFP

GYEONGIU (South Korea): A protester wearing a head cut-out depicting Donald Trump, walks with others during a rally against the US president and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit.—Reuters